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Abstract. In this article, analyses of Thucydides' story of the Spartan siege of Plataea (2.71–78) and of his plague narrative (2.47–54) show that Thucydides' references to natural and man-made materials characterize actors and events and are deployed for the exploration of political, cultural, and scientific themes. At the same time, Thucydides' references respond to his fifth-century reader's knowledge and concerns: Thucydides' readers were not Epicureans. I argue that Thucydidean narrative is therefore less friendly to Epicurean re-use than is sometimes assumed. Lucretius, the poet of the material, perceived this, and his reworking of Thucydides' powerful plague narrative aims to turn it to Epicurean ends.

IN THE EARLIER PARTS OF THE LAST CENTURY, scholarship on the physical aspects of Thucydides' plague narrative focused on defining Thucydides' relationship with the medical writings of fifth-century Athens. Thucydides' plague narrative was considered to instantiate "the most intimate link between Thucydides and Hippocrates."[1] In 1969, however, Adam Parry showed that the demonstrable link between Thucydides and the Hippocratics was tenuous, and in later years the endeavor to define the relationship between Thucydides and the medical scientists of his day began to give way to an increasing focus on the rhetorical impact of Thucydides' narrative.[2] Results were frustratingly slight. By 2001, after a careful review of much previous work, E. M. Craik could conclude only that "the ways in which [Thucydides] adapted the ideas of contemporary medicine to serve his own literary and historiographical needs are complex."[3]

[1] Cochrane 1929, 27.

[2] For examples, see Woodman 1988, 32–39; Rusten 1989; Hornblower 1991 (quoted in note 3); Morgan 1994; Orwin, 1994, 182.

[3] Craik 2001, 107. Cf. Parry 1969, 106–18. Craik's conclusion echoes Hornblower's *Commentary on Thucydides* (1991, 318) which reaches the same generalizing conclusion about Thucydides' rhetorical strategies in this passage: "I prefer to think that Th.'s approach to his subject-matter was *complex* [my italics] and that he could think and therefore write

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This disappointing result may have to do with our method of approach to the text. Despite our focus on the physical and our ultimate conclusion that Thucydides adapts physical evidence to rhetorical aims, contemporary analyses do not ask how Thucydides deployed physical evidence and materials to achieve those aims.[4] This article addresses the issue directly. Analysis of the role of materials in Thucydidean narrative has been inhibited by the tendency inherited from historical positivism to reduce Thucydides' materials to "facts" (or errors) without further significance.[5] By contrast, I will argue that Thucydides' presentation of the dissolving bodies and civic structure of Athens relies on a "rhetoric of materials" to create some of its most important meanings. Lucretius, the poet of the material, was well qualified to perceive this practice. After describing the functions of Thucydides' references to natural and man-made materials, this article will ask how Lucretius reacted to Thucydides' materials and their meanings.[6]

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about it in different ways in different moods." In recent years the attempt to define Hippocratic influence has often been abandoned or disqualified as useless. Cf. Sonnabend 2004, 94 (my trans.): "Otiose, because impossible to decide, is the discussion of the question as to whether the historian Thucydides in his diagnosis of historical processes received important inspiration from contemporary medicine, or whether on the contrary he transferred the logic of historical events onto medicine." However, the debate is not over, since Thomas 2006, 92, productively revisits the exact question, taking "the passage on the Plague as a case study for the complexity of attributing intellectual influences or debts to Thucydides."

[4] For the purposes of this article, physical evidence and materials in Thucydides' text are taken to be indicated by words (usually concrete nouns/adjectives) that designate a material thing, or the physical characteristics of a material thing. Nearly all such words in this article are narrator focalized. When character focalized materials are mentioned, this will be noted. See, e.g., n. 37. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

[5] The effects of this attitude persist even as the main tenets that supported it have been mostly abandoned. Thus, for instance, Allison 1997, 67, argues that the description of the plague is value neutral: "The plague . . . is pure material for sense perceptions. This *neutral event* allows Thucydides to proceed to examine human reaction." This view leads her to maintain that Thucydides was indifferent to evaluating the elements of his narrative (73): "The symptoms of the plague function like raw material that can be brought into language without having to make judgments about several possible accounts or bodies of evidence. Thucydides . . . apparently did not see the need to articulate a step of evaluating which of the plague's traits was worthy of account." For a more comprehensive statement of this view of Thucydides, see Darbo-Peschanski 1987, 194.

[6] The argument will hopefully go some small way to closing the gulf between Thucydides and Lucretius, whom we tend to separate quite rigorously. E.g., Commager 1957, 108: "What was in Thucydides a baldly factual account becomes in Lucretius one freighted with moral overtones"; or Clay 1983, 262: "Thucydides . . . was infinitely more clinical, distant and impersonal than Lucretius." Consistent with her predecessors, Stoddard 1996 argues that in Thucydides' "clinical account" (115) "the moral element . . . is . . . treated apart

Since few studies of Thucydides' presentation of the physical world have been attempted, the following analysis will proceed in a somewhat unorthodox fashion.[7] In order to demonstrate how Thucydides organizes and deploys references to materials, the first section of this article describes Thucydides' references to natural and man-made materials in the story of the Siege of Plataea (2.71–78). This particular passage was partly chosen because Lucretius read this story and translated a short passage from it in ways that will be interesting to compare to his work on Thucydides' plague narrative.[8]

More important for the argument is the comparison, internal to Thucydides, between this passage and the plague narrative. This comparison, which is obviously not comprehensive in terms of its description of Thucydides' rhetorical practices, will nevertheless offer the foundation for an argument that Thucydides' deployment of materials is intended to persuade. The two passages display a similar and related presentation of human material culture and the natural world in which references to material things, be they man-made or natural, are used to characterize both actors and events and are also devoted to supporting political, scientific, and historical arguments. At the same time, since Thucydides' materials must persuade, they respond to the reader's familiar cultural values.

Once we have reviewed the rhetoric of materials in Thucydides' Plataean story and in the plague narrative, the final section of the article will go on to make some suggestions about the implications of this rhetoric for Lucretius. Can we discern Lucretius' response to the meanings of Thucydides' materials?

THE SIEGE OF PLATAEA

In the summer of 429, Archidamus, King of Sparta, arrived on Plataean land with a large army of Spartans and allies. When the Plataeans, who

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from the physical effects of the plague" (109). Cf. Cochrane 1929, 27, and Segal 1990, 4. On the psychologizing tendencies of the scholarly and literary reaction to Lucretius since the Renaissance, see Clay 1983, 251; Johnson 2000, 79–133; Rumpf 2003, 19–27.

[7]The idea of examining the rhetorical deployment of materials and objects in historical narrative is of course neither new nor revolutionary, and some useful articles offer important paradigms for this analysis. See, e.g., Marshall 1975, Lateiner 1977, or Dewald 1993 (on Herodotus).

[8]The sentence from 2.77.4 trans. at *DRN* 1.897–900 is discussed in the third section of this article. On the argument that this sentence in Thucydides is an interpolation, see n. 21.

were Athenian allies, refused to transfer their allegiance to the Spartan alliance, Archidamus used this army to compel the Plataeans to enter into negotiations (2.71–73). Unfortunately, these negotiations cannot be discussed here.[9] It must suffice to say that they produced the worst possible result from the Spartan point of view: an adamant Plataean declaration of loyalty to Athens, come what may (2.74.1).

Thucydides represents Archidamus' reaction to the Plataean decision by providing a record of his pre-attack prayer. In this prayer, Archidamus addresses the gods and heroes of the Plataean land, arguing to them that Spartan aggression against Plataea is justified and lawful (2.74.2).[10] He wants the gods, and particularly these gods of the land and the locality, to sanction his view that the Spartan attack is justified, despite Sparta's oaths, taken after victory over the Persians at Plataea in 479, to defend Plataea.[11] Archidamus hopes, but cannot know, whether the gods will sanction his view of affairs. In the story that follows, the cautious Spartans do not immediately attack Plataea but first try to compel the Plataeans to concede by building a mound in front of their city.

Archidamus' decision to build a mound is further motivated by the expectation "that [the Spartans] would effect a very swift capture, since such a large army was at work" (2.75.1). But the hopes that Archidamus has invested in the gods and in his army will be disappointed, and at the climax of the story the Spartans' failure to recapture the site of post-Persian War Greek unity will cause them to turn to extreme measures.

The fact that the story of the siege of Plataea is built into an examination of important historical and political themes, such as the failure of Greek unity, makes Thucydides' decision to realize this story partly through the depiction of Spartan and Plataean labor on natural and man-made materials all the more interesting. Thucydides' work with references to materials begins simultaneously with the Spartans' work at Plataea, since Thucydides begins the story of the siege by showing selected Spartan labors on Plataean land and providing a reason why they undertook

[9] On the narrative of Book 2 as a whole, see Stahl 1966 (viz. 2003), 65–102; on the Spartans, Debnar 2001, 96–102.

[10] These gods are the particular gods who would be offended by an illegal occupation of Plataean land. Archidamus does not, for instance, pray to Apollo, who has promised to aid the Spartans (1.118.3, cf. 2.54.4) or to Hera, at whose temple in the Plataean *chora* Pausanias successfully prayed for victory during the Battle of Plataea, an event to which Archidamus refers in his prayer (cf. Hdt. 9.61.3). On Spartan fears of chthonic revenge: 1.101.2, 3.89.1, 6.95.1.

[11] These oaths are mentioned just previously to the prayer at 2.71.2–4 and 2.72.1.

them. Thus, he relates that before beginning on their mound the numerous Spartans first cut down Plataea's trees and use them to make a barricade around the city "so that no one could go out through it" (2.75.1). To form the mound itself, they haul wood from nearby Mount Cithaeron and begin to build up a lattice of beams for both sides of the mound. The beams will function "instead of walls"; their purpose is to prevent the earth from pouring through the sides of the mound (2.75.2).

As Thucydides' explanations show, this labor is not a mere prelude to construction. Through these actions the Spartans have imprisoned both the Plataean polis and its land. Furthermore, the Plataean land, with its trees, has been reduced to landfill.[12] Thucydides reports that the Spartans "were carrying wood for [the mound] and stones and earth and whatever else, being thrown in, would help hurry the job along" (2.75.2).[13] The Spartans have quickly turned the land and everything on it to their purposes.

However, the next stages of the project become more difficult. First, the Spartans are compelled to discover that material transformations are reciprocal. In order to transform the *chora* into landfill, they must transform their army into earth carriers. The job is huge, in proportion to human beings, and the Spartans compelled (ἠνάγκαζον) their allies to carry without stopping: "They were piling up the mound for [an unknown number of] days and nights continuously, divided according to rests, so that some men were carrying, others taking food and sleep" (2.75.3).[14] Like the land, the allied soldiers have become use-objects of the Spartan

[12] Thucydides distinguishes between human or cultural materials (land, trees) and the substances from which they are formed (dirt, wood). Trees (δένδρα), mentioned at 2.72.3 and 2.75.1 become after this wood (ὕλη: 2.75.2, 2.77.3, 2.77.4) or logs (ξύλα: 2.75.2, 2.75.5), or planks (πλίνθους: 2.75.4), or beams (δοκούς: 2.76.4). (The adjective "wooden" [ξύλινος] is used at 2.75.4.) Plataean land is mentioned at 2.72.3, 2.73.1, 2.74.1, and 2.74.2. In the latter sentence (Archidamus' prayer), it is mentioned several times. After this the word γῆ comes to denote a material part of landfill. It is used less frequently and in alteration with nouns that denote the other fillers of the Spartan mound. γῆ as material occurs at 2.75.2, 2.76.1, and 2.76.2, "the poured stuff" (ὁ χοῦς) at 2.76.2, 2.76.3, clay (πηλός) at 2.76.2. "The poured thing," i.e., the mound (τὸ χῶμα): 2.75.4, 2.76.2, 2.76.3, 2.76.4, 2.77.1.

[13] Herodotean influence on Thucydides' style is pronounced in this passage. Note, for instance, the thematic and stylistic similarity of this passage to Herodotus' description of the building of the defensive wall at the isthmus during the Persian Wars: "they brought in stones and bricks and logs and baskets full of sand, and those who had come to help rested at no time, during neither the night nor during the day" (Hdt. 8.71.2). In both historians the accumulating concrete nouns, joined by polysyndeton, illustrate unceasing labor.

[14] Because of textual corruption we cannot know for how many days or weeks the Spartans continued to work.

plan and are reduced from their previous natural and cultural existence to this single role. Not even the basic regularities of human life (Thucydides' example is rest at night) remain to the Spartan carriers.

Second, the Spartan project becomes more difficult because the Plataeans contrive to increase even this tremendous investment of Spartan labor. In response to the pile of earth they see rising before them (2.75.4), the Plataeans also build: they construct and place on top of their city wall, opposite the mound, a "wooden wall" (ξύλινον τεῖχος, 2.75.4), which they fill with bricks taken from nearby houses.

In Herodotus, the Delphic oracle (after repeated Athenian supplications) had prophesied that Athens would be protected by a "wooden wall" (ξύλινον τεῖχος, Hdt. 7.141.3). The meaning of the oracle was disputed, but Herodotus seems to show that Themistocles had found the right interpretation: Themistocles argued that the oracle referred to the Athenian fleet that subsequently won the Battle of Salamis. This wooden wall successfully defended the Athenians and therefore replaced the walls of Athens, which had already been captured by the Persians.

Thus, Herodotus' account originated the symbolism of these famous words.[15] They signal a naturally weak defense that nevertheless prevails against much stronger forces. More a frame than a wall, Thucydides' wooden wall serves as "a binding for [the Plataeans'] construction, lest it should become weak from height" (2.75.5). The Plataeans further protect this structure with "hides and skins" so that the Spartans cannot destroy it with incendiary arrows (2.75.5). By detailing the weak materials of this wall—the wooden frame, the borrowed bricks, the protective hides and skins—Thucydides constructs a vividly fragile opponent for the Spartan mound.[16] It works well, however. Fragile as it may be, the wall compels the Spartans to ever-further labors, since in order to get any advantage from their immovable mound the Spartans must pile it higher and higher.

In the next sentences, the Plataeans continue to consume the Spartans' advantage in manpower. While the Spartans have many men,

[15] Aristophanes' reuse of these words in *Knights* (1040) displays their familiarity.

[16] Walls are generally important for the characterization of the Plataeans and their Spartan enemies throughout the Plataean story. See 2.3.3 where the Plataeans build a barrier of oxcarts, with which they defend their city from the Theban attack that begins the story (and the Peloponnesian War). This barrier is even weaker than the wooden wall of the present passage. At 3.21, the Spartan siege wall at Plataea is depicted in detail, and the escape from this wall of 220 Plataeans is described at 3.22–23. Finally (3.68.3), the Spartans demolish Plataea, including the city wall, and recycle its elements to build an inn.

the Plataeans have a natural ally in their own heavy earth. They deploy this ally to the utmost advantage, digging through the city wall where the mound is rising in order to steal earth from the mound (2.75.6). The Spartans respond by fortifying that part of the mound with heavy clay bound into woven mats (2.76.1), but the Plataeans dig a tunnel, and calculating where they are beneath the mound, they take "the heaped stuff" (τὸν χοῦν) from there. Immense Spartan labors are wasted: "And [the Plataeans] remained unperceived by those outside for a long time, with the result that although they [i.e., the Spartans] were throwing [earth] on top they were progressing less rapidly, since the stuff of the mound was being brought away from beneath them and was continuously subsiding upon a spot that had been emptied" (2.76.2). Thucydides' description suggests that the Spartans are paying the price for transforming their army into carriers. Their soldiers exercise no capacity of perception but carry like beasts of burden who dump their loads whether or not the project is making progress.

In this story the Spartans have so far dealt almost exclusively with natural materials. Archidamus prayed to the Plataean land but then had his army reduce it to landfill in order to use it for the mound. The Spartans soon discovered that their power to move the requisite earth was barely sufficient even when they enslaved themselves to the task. By contrast, the versatile Plataeans have successfully deployed man-made materials for their improvised wall and, just as successfully, they have forced the Spartans to compete for the earth that is so heavy for them to carry.

Thus nature and the clever Plataeans thwart Archidamus' expectation of an easy victory.[17] Our story reveals a familiar plotline: in their pride or blindness (*atē*), the Spartans have overestimated their power over nature and are paying the penalty. Part of that penalty is delusion: the Spartans believe that they have captured the Plataeans, their city, and their land.[18] In fact, their plan has made them captives of the Plataeans, who are able to lead the Spartans into wasting themselves ever further on their oversized enterprise.[19] Their labor, however, is surely their main

[17] This is a regular feature of Thucydidean war stories: parties who project that their task will be easy are rarely correct. Cf., e.g., 4.5.1 (the Spartans expect an easy victory at Pylos) or 6.24.2–3 (the Athenians expect easy success in Sicily).

[18] Delusion is a common penalty for rising against the gods. In Sophocles' *Ajax* and Euripides' *Bacchae* and *Hippolytus*, for instance, the gods punish *hubris* against themselves, their worship and/or their favorites by making human beings delusional.

[19] Another favorite Thucydidean trope: the attackers become besieged. Cf. Thucydides' narratives of the battles at Sphacteria (4.14.3–4) and Syracuse (7.11.4).

punishment. The narrative's unchanging focus on the laborious construction of the mound offers no escape from the enslavement the Spartans force themselves and their allies to endure. This provides an ironic contrast to the rhetoric of "freeing the Greeks" (2.72.1) Archidamus had used to try to move the Plataeans to join his side.

Although the middle phases of the contest between Sparta and Plataea contain much of interest, we will skip to the end of the story, by which time the exhausted Spartans perceive that their mound has been unsuccessful. They are initially reduced to *aporia* (2.77.1) but then decide to use the mound as a platform from which to destroy the city with fire. Even from this height they can reach only one side of Plataea with ammunition, but they hope (2.77.2 and 2.77.5) that a wind will come up to help them burn the city "since it was not large" (2.77.2). Thucydides provides a vivid picture of their action (2.77.3):

> Bringing torches of wood they first threw them in side by side from the mound to the middle space between the wall and the place where the mound was advancing. But when it quickly became full on account of the many hands, they piled up more [torches] over as much of the rest of the city as they were able to cover from their high vantage, and throwing down fire with sulfur and pitch, they lit the wood.

The mound's potential as an instrument of war is finally realized. Standing on their mound, the numerous Spartans throw down torches and chemicals as they perform the ancient equivalent of a bombing run. Now that they have failed to make Plataea their own, Spartan aims and attitudes have hardened. Their new goal is not the political domination of Plataea but the annihilation of Plataea. We note that the materials of this passage—the great accumulation of torches thrown by "the many hands" into every available space and the incendiary chemicals with which the Spartans hoped to light a devastating fire—are Thucydides' key evidence for their destructive aims.

As mentioned, the Spartans are hoping that a wind will blow their fire across the city. This hope places them in nature's power. As earth did earlier, now wind will prove to be both indifferent to and greater than Spartan plans. Thucydides emphasizes that the Spartan fire was very large and reports that it was a bigger artificial flame than anyone of his time had ever seen (2.77.4).[20] But "in the mountains," he continues,

[20] Implying that many did see it: a public relations disaster for the Spartans. Cf. Garlan 1974, 19–20, on the Greek horror of the destruction of cities. The scene also conforms to

"wood rubbed together by wind spontaneously sent up fire and flame from this [i.e., from being moved by the wind]."[21] Thucydides contrasts the Spartans' laboriously produced fire, made possible by the mound, the combined armies of Sparta and her allies, and as much pyrotechnology as the Spartans possess, with mountain forest fires and once again puts human labor in the context of nature's spontaneous power. It is normal for nature to form a hill of earth. In the same way, a fire of this size would be a natural result of wind blowing through a forest. By contrast, the Spartans' attempts to be as powerful as nature are costing them enormous struggles and will fail at the end. Lucretius cites this sentence at *De Rerum Natura* 1.897–900, and we will briefly discuss his translation in the third part of this article. Thucydides goes on to show that nature remained uncooperative with Spartan plans to the end. If the wind the Spartans hoped for had arisen, he says, the fire would have destroyed Plataea. But the wind did not arise; instead, so it was reported (λέγεται), it rained, and plentiful water, with thunder, put out the fire, so that the Plataeans were momentarily safe (2.77.6).

Thus nature, following its own laws, did not happen to help the Spartans. Or perhaps Archidamus was right to pray to the Plataean *chora* and hubristic to attack it. Like Herodotus' Croesus, the Plataeans are rescued by a sudden and plentiful rain, which, in Thucydides, is reported to have been complete with thunder.[22] The narrative begins with a prayer to the epichoric heroes and ends with salvation from the sky, not what we think of as typical Thucydides. It leaves open the possibility that the

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the tradition Thucydides is following: in Herodotus, Plataea is burned by the Persians for remaining loyal to Greece (Hdt. 8.50).

[21] Calder 1984, 485–86, argues that 2.77.4 is an interpolation. Although he follows the relation between Thucydides' Greek and Lucretius' Latin, he considers no internal stylistic evidence for whether or not the sentence is Thucydidean. But the sentence exhibits Thucydidean prose habits: Thucydides frequently used noun doubling (anadiplosis), as in this sentence ("fire and flame"), to bring material indices to the surface of a narrative. This sentence also emphasizes the spontaneity of the natural fire with duplication (two adverbial expressions, here trans. "spontaneity" and "by itself"). Ironically, if Calder had extended his researches to the whole Plataean story he might have discovered more and better evidence for pre-Socratic influence. The view that this sentence is an interpolation has found only limited acceptance. Cf. Rusten 1989 and Hornblower 1991.

[22] Cf. Hdt. 1.87.2. The two scenes are not exact parallels: in Herodotus the rescuing rain is reported (by Herodotus' sources) to have come from a clear sky after Croesus prays to Apollo, and does not thunder. In reference to the effect of lucky weather on the Plataean story as a whole, see also 2.5.1–3, where the Theban reinforcements marching to Plataea are decisively slowed by rain.

Spartans' attempt to force their will onto the gods of the Plataean *chora* has provoked divine resistance. At the same time, the story is firmly anchored in natural necessities.[23]

The Plataean narrative just reviewed displays materials we associate with pre-Socratic philosophic culture. Basic materials of the Plataean narrative—earth, fire, wind, and water, for instance—are the familiar four elements of the Empedoclean description of the world.[24] Furthermore, the presentation of these materials emphasizes their character as substances. For instance, the inert weight of Plataean land posed a natural limitation on Spartan plans, and again, the fire would have been insuperable if the wind had joined it. As it was, the opposing force—rain—quenched the fire.[25]

At the same time, the story of the transformation of the Plataean land to landfill takes place in the political and religious context set by Archidamus' prayer to "the gods and heroes of the Plataean land." Consistent with this, attention to the materials of this story reveals its similarities to Attic tragedy: the plot features reversals caused by *atē* and *hubris*.[26] Most surprisingly for the modern reader, Thucydides' decision to conclude the story of this episode by narrating that the Spartan fire was extinguished by "plentiful rain and thunder" suggests an integration

[23] Thus, Thucydides may have seen less conflict between these two explanations of the world than we often think. The contrast, for example, between passages like 2.28 (in which an eclipse is described as a natural phenomenon, occurring, as far as Thucydides could tell, at the natural time) and 1.23.3–4 (in which Thucydides adduces a list of natural disasters he says accompanied the war, including earthquakes, eclipses, droughts, and the plague) shows that Thucydides wrote up a broad range of responses to natural phenomena. Like Herodotus, he simultaneously despised superstition. Superstitious fear of thunderstorms (see, e.g., the Syracusans at 6.70.1 and later the Athenians at 7.79.3) or eclipses (e.g., 7.50.4) was useless or harmful, in his view. As is evident, however, the reactions of those whom he considers to be confused by passion do not cause him to adopt a dogmatically rationalistic position.

[24] A fifth example of a "scientific" material would be wood, ὕλη, a word which could mean "material" as early as Homer and later came to mean "substance" or "matter." Cf. LSJ s.v. One could argue that the influence visible here seems to be less the influence of the Periclean circle and Anaxagoras, and more that of Empedocles, through Gorgias and Antiphon. But the terminology was widely disseminated among those interested in philosophy and medicine, so that such suggestions must remain entirely speculative. Cf. Freeman 1935, 65–75.

[25] Thus we have not just elements, but elements in conflict (as Empedocles describes them), or (but this is perhaps to overinterpret) at war.

[26] Not to mention its overall similarity to the plot of *OC*. Archidamus fails, where Oedipus miraculously succeeds, in getting support from the surrounding landscape.

of the plot of natural necessity with a plot of divine justice.[27] What can explain the fact that the materials are engaged in this combination of scientific, literary, and traditional values?

Let us look further. The Plataean narrative also deploys references to man-made materials, and these are exploited for the historical and political associations material culture can support. For instance, the description of the Plataeans' improvised wall was couched in the language of Herodotus' description of the Athenian defense of Greece against the Persian invasions.[28] Again, Thucydides' culminating focus on the accumulation of firebrands and chemicals, in the report of the Spartan firing of Plataea, displays the Spartan decision to destroy Plataea, a new political fact. References to man-made materials can be used to refer to—or to create—events in human history. In sum, Thucydides deploys references to natural and man-made materials for a wide variety of purposes. This strategy is founded on his decision to use materials to illustrate his political and scientific analysis. At the same time, however, the references respond to the meanings ancient Greek readers brought to understanding the narrative.

This last idea is contentious. However, it is logical that both natural and man-made materials in these narratives would respond to the ancient reader's knowledge and expectations as well as to the author's insights.[29] Thucydides was not able to change the traditional meanings that cultivated land, for instance, would have for his readers but could only deploy those meanings to suggest the significance, both for the combatants and for his readers, of the events.[30] This logic applies equally to the more

[27] It is, however, a matter of common agreement that religious themes are important for the Plataean story as a whole. Most commentators point to the strong presence of this theme in the speech of the captive Plataeans before the Spartan judges (3.53–58) and to the symbolic nature of the fact that after destroying Plataea, the Spartans build a temple to Hera from the materials of the city (3.68). Cf. Jordan 1986, 140–42.

[28] While the particular passage goes unnoticed, general support for the notion that Thucydides is here following Herodotean themes can be found in Rood 1999.

[29] In general Thucydides uses a smaller repertoire of familiar objects than Herodotus, who often deploys symbolic and/or mysterious materials (cf. Dewald 1993, Hollman 2005). The familiarity of the objects and materials Thucydides mentions supports the density of his explanations. On Thucydides' exploitation of familiarity, ubiquity, density, and so forth, see Shanske 2007 (15–18). As an aside, the fact that Thucydides uses familiar objects might be used to support the argument that Thucydides had a listening, as well as a reading, audience. Listeners, especially if actually non-readers, might find Thucydides' use of familiar materials to illustrate his arguments particularly useful.

[30] Thus, cultivated land, for instance, would be a familiar and meaningful element of the world to every Greek. On the Athenians' attachment to land similar or identical to

famous materials of the larger narrative, such as golden grasshoppers or large navies. Thucydides' readership comes to each material reference with an idea about its meaning, significance, and history.[31] Thucydides exploits these meanings in order to persuade the reader. He seems to have understood that such references resonate with readers; perhaps he learned this from his own experience of reading Herodotus and Homer. At the same time, he has his own idea about what the things themselves are and mean, and this idea will often derive from contemporary theoretical debates or his analysis of political events.

Thus, there is no reason not to associate these materials with pre-Socratic culture, and in fact, the materials of the Plataean passage seem to be an as yet undiscovered source of such associations. Nevertheless, a reason why the discovery of such associations should determine our attitude toward this passage or the plague passage would need to be found. Such an attitude seems foreign to Thucydides' mode of deploying materials, which exploits a bundle of meanings created by the author, his predecessors, and the audience of both.

I shall argue that the plague narrative exploits materials in the same way as the Plataean narrative. The materials and physical evidence of the plague passage are intended to persuade the reader. They are used to characterize actors and events and are fully engaged in Thucydides' ethical, political, and cultural explorations.

If this idea is accurate, Thucydides' narrative posed a problem for Lucretius: Thucydides' readers were not Epicureans, and his rhetorical deployment of materials did not respond to Epicurean values or sensibilities. Our examination of Lucretius' plague narrative will confirm that Lucretius read the rhetorical intentions of Thucydides' materials and perceived a wide range of cultural and scientific meanings and that he found many of these meanings unfriendly to Epicureanism.

Plataea, see Thucydides' presentation of their distress upon being compelled to abandon Attica at 2.14.2 and 2.16.2. Cf. the golden grasshoppers of 1.6.3 (symbols the Athenians adopted in order to show that they were sprung from the soil).

[31] Indeed, to disabuse readers of previously formed associations is a difficult and complicated task. Cf. Thucydides' effort to change our ideas about the meaning of Sparta's and Athens' built culture in chap. 10 of the Archaeology.

THUCYDIDES' PLAGUE

Let us examine Thucydides' plague narrative, focusing on passages Lucretius rewrote, such as Thucydides' description of the first attack of the plague upon an individual sufferer (2.49.2–4):

> Suddenly, although they had been healthy, and for no discernable reason, severe fevers of the head and redness and swelling of the eyes took [them], and the things within [the head], the throat and tongue, were immediately blood-red, and a strange and ill-smelling breath came forth. And then, [progressing] from these symptoms, sneezing and hoarseness ensued, and not much later the misery descended into the chest, with forceful coughing. And when it settled in the stomach, it overwhelmed it, and cleansings followed, of every kind of bile for which the doctors have names, and these with great suffering. And for most people an empty [= unproductive] retching followed, producing a strong convulsion, and this happened to some people upon the cessation of the previous symptoms, and to others long afterward.[32]

Like the story of the Spartan effort to build the mound at Plataea, the story of the plague is clearly and decisively reported. Whether Thucydides did or did not think of his terms for the parts and organs of the body as scientific or medical, he uses them here to create a vivid awareness of the plague's horrors. Hope for the sufferer is incrementally compromised as the plague travels downward from the head and each part of the body succumbs in its characteristic way to the increasingly deadly disease. The plot is divided into brief, vivid, and regular events (in the Greek, we observe persistent parataxis).[33] Just as in the Plataean passage, Thucydides here uses familiar, if not exactly ordinary materials, to full rhetorical effect.[34] The passage's force is achieved through an easily

[32] My translation follows the thorough explanations of Craik 2001, 106–7, which places the *kardia* in the upper digestive tract. Contrast Hornblower 1991, 322, who argues (with Dover 1997) that *kardia* indicates the heart.

[33] Dover 1997, 72–78, suggests that parataxis is more common in Thucydides' writing than we have usually believed. On Thucydides' privileging of nouns, see Hornblower 2004, 360. On noun doublings (anadiplosis or hendiadys), another stylistic habit that pertains to the deployment of materials in Thucydides, see Foster 2002, 26–49.

[34] The argument that the plague passage uses technical terminology learned from the medical writers has recently reached a middle ground between outright sponsorship (cf. Page 1953) and outright denial (cf. Parry 1969). Both Craik 2001 and Thomas 2006 take a middle view. For example, Thomas (97): "The overall impression in Thucydides then, is of a sustained display of medical terms, sophisticated and unusual, if not actually technical."

discernable arrangement that deploys each familiar part of the body as a station along the way to destruction.

In the Plataean narrative, the stymied Spartans, unable to achieve progress, had dealt with the same material—earth—over and over again. By contrast, in the plague story the attacking disease passes through the variety of bodily materials in a swift succession of easy victories. The driving pace of the plague description soon requires Thucydides to deploy numerous striking adjectives at once in order to draw our attention to a particular moment of the progressive disaster (2.49.5):

> And if anyone touched the outside of the body, it was not excessively warm, nor was it pallid, but flushed, bright, and florid with small blisters and wounds. But the inner parts of the body were burning so that they could not endure the touch of the lightest coverings or sheets, or to be anything else but naked; most of all they desired to throw themselves into cold water. And many of the neglected did this, throwing themselves into the wells, afflicted by their ceaseless thirst. But more and less drink were the same.

The flow of symptoms is interrupted for a moment of close observation and in order to provide a short initial story about the psychological consequences of the disease.[35] The moment is significant: the disease has passed from something recognizable to something that defies our understanding. Although the first symptoms were familiar (red eyes, sore throats, and retching are known to us all), these ugly and fearsome symptoms are difficult to understand and severe enough to drive the patients to madness.[36]

The length and indecision of the debate show, perhaps, something about the text, namely that the medical words refer to familiar body parts to which all readers are attached, and which can therefore be used for rhetorical, as well as explanatory purposes. This is also Thomas's conclusion (103): "[Thucydides] offers a picture in fact more consistent with the vision of the plague in epic and tragedy, but he does so with the scrupulous language and proof of current scientific debate."

[35] "Interrupted" is perhaps somewhat too strong a word here, but Thucydides' deployment of many adjectives causes a sudden slowing of narrative pace that is evident even in English trans.

[36] We may argue that the Athenian observer is a "representative focalizer," that is, one who stands for the reader. This is certainly how Lucretius understood the observer. Cf. *DRN* 6.1163. We may also argue that Thucydides is engaging with the scientific discourse of his day when he shows the incapacity of visible signs to help with interpreting the invisible disease. On the understanding of such signs in the historians and the pre-Socratics, see Asmis 1984, 218–19.

Simultaneously, Thucydides' depiction of the inexplicable new symptoms of the disease exposes the moment in which the personal cost of the disease becomes a civic catastrophe. By juxtaposing his horribly detailed description of the surface appearances of the disease with the statement that the sick could not endure to be covered and desired only to be naked, Thucydides achieves intense visibility for the already vivid symptoms.[37] He capitalizes on this visibility when he relates that the desire to be naked quickly culminated in the madness that impelled "the neglected" among the patients to throw themselves into wells.[38] The reader, who is uncomfortably aware of the patients' open sores, is compelled to perceive the pollution and contagion that will inevitably result and therefore to understand that the neglected patients' personal sufferings have become a disaster for the whole community.

Thucydides' intense rhetorical investment in creating this turning point in the story of the plague's progress should be noted by all who treat this account as "clinical."[39] As for his references to materials, so far in the plague passage Thucydides' materials have been mostly natural, although one significant set of man-made objects—the city wells—has supported Thucydides' presentation of the intensification and spread of the disaster. Here as in the Plataean story, the disruption of necessary resources (there land, here water) foreshadows the destruction of the city itself.[40] In both stories Thucydides exploits our attachments (to land, city, or our familiar bodies, for instance) to achieve emotional effects. Also in both stories, nature (there, for instance, the earth, wind, and fire; here, the plague) is a much bigger force than human power can influence. Our hopes for wind (2.77.2 and 5) or frantic lust for water (2.49.5) are equally powerless.

Thucydides' interest in the necessities of the human relationship to nature was likely welcome to Lucretius. But Thucydides' materials were

[37] See Dewald 2005, 6–7, on the importance of an awareness of juxtaposition for discovering meaning in Thucydidean narrative. Juxtaposition, and a technique often called "tragic *akribeia*" (as seen here, for instance, in the accumulated adjectives), combine to give this passage its particular vividness. Cf. Hornblower 1994, 138.

[38] In the ancient world, physical ugliness and visible disease could provoke hatred and contempt. Reactions to Homer's Thersites and Sophocles' Philoctetes are classic examples. The patience of the caregivers who do not neglect their horrid charges contrasts to this reaction.

[39] Cf. n. 6 above.

[40] Thucydides had already suggested at 2.48.2 that the Athenians' first thought, when the plague began, was that the Spartans had poisoned the wells. He will continue to exploit this drastic theme in 2.52.1–3.

also engaged in lines of thought that were less friendly to Epicureanism. For instance, in the Plataean story, Thucydides relies on Herodotus' records of oracles and miracles and provides suggestions that processes such as rain may be under the control of forces more powerful than nature. Both of these procedures are contrary to Epicurean principles.[41] If Lucretius perceived that the materials of Thucydides' plague narrative supported such meanings, he would be compelled to exclude or redefine such materials when he re-used the narrative, as well as to alter the narrative that had been constructed in accord with such values. I will argue that this in fact did happen. We will continue our analysis of the Thucydidean text by reviewing passages Lucretius changed or omitted so as to free his narrative from the original Thucydidean connotations. We will briefly review Thucydides' descriptions of the psychological consequences of the plague and then analyze more closely Thucydides' final description of the plague-stricken city. Finally, we will briefly discuss Thucydides' remarks on the plague and the gods.

Thucydides reports that the threat of destruction produced a variety of psychological reactions. Among those who believed themselves infected, for instance, it could produce a deep and self-destructive depression (2.51.4). On the other hand, those who believed themselves healthy sometimes neglected others because of their fear of contagion and by this behavior caused further and unnecessary deaths (2.51.5). Others who may have been healthy, however, showed bravery and compassion: some "neglected themselves and went to their friends when at last even the families, defeated by so much evil, were exhausted by the cries of the dying" (2.51.5). Finally, Thucydides reports the progress of the survivors of the disease, who had learned from their own experience of the plague to feel sympathy for the sick and dying (2.51.6):

> Those who had escaped the disease pitied the dying and the sick more than ever because they knew beforehand [what they would suffer] and were themselves now feeling confident. For the disease did not take the same man twice, so as to actually kill him. And the others called them blessed.

[41] Cf. the summary of Lucretius' Epicurean principles in Kenney 1971, 3: "The Epicurean philosophy was materialistic: [it] . . . taught that all phenomena are produced by the motion, according to certain laws, of solid and indestructible bodies (atoms) in the void. Nothing is created out of nothing; nothing is resolved into nothing; everything, except the individual atoms themselves, is subject to change. The human soul, like the human body, is composed of atoms and is mortal. The gods exist, but do not regulate either natural phenomena or human affairs."

The survivors model that compassion for the dying which Thucydides' vivid presentation of the symptoms hopes to inspire in the reader.[42] Thus, while Thucydides' description of the trials of the human body provokes the reader's fear of sickness and death, it also allows for a traditional moment of recognition (*gnosis*). As in Homer's depiction of Achilles' response to Priam (*Il.* 507–50), for example, or Herodotus' account of Cyrus' self-examination at Croesus' pyre (Hdt. 1.86.6), in Thucydides' plague narrative the shared experience of human vulnerability produces compassion. The moment seems especially marked in that Thucydides himself may be identified as one of the survivors who learned to pity the suffering of others.[43] Thucydides' account of Athenian psychology during the plague differs sharply, as we shall see, from Lucretius' presentation.

The brief moment of relief offered by Thucydides' story of the survivors' progress toward wisdom is followed by a rhetorical acme, in which the plague narrative returns to the depiction of material necessity and physical deterioration. The dramatic climax of the plague narrative is Thucydides' report of the particularly severe ordeals endured by the Attic population, victims twice over who immigrate into the city to escape the war, only to fall into the grip of the plague (2.52.1–3):

> The migration from the fields into the city weighed upon the [Athenians] more in the context of their present distress, and especially on those who had come in. For since there were no houses available, but rather they were living in huts that were stifling from the season of the year, the destruction was happening without any order, but rather [than there being any order] the corpses, dying, were even lying on top of each other, and they were rolling in the streets, and [half dead they were rolling] around all the springs, because of their desire for water. And the temples in which they had taken shelter were full of corpses dying there.

A short sentence would have sufficed to impart the information transmitted in this passage. Instead, a vivid and selective account of civic chaos and bodily degeneration reveals a disintegrating city.[44] Just as the

[42] This narrative device (i.e., the modeling of reader reaction) is not uncommon in Thucydides. The most famous example is at 7.71.1–5 where Thucydides depicts the reactions of the Athenians and their allies watching the naval battle in the harbor at Syracuse.

[43] Cf. 2.48.3. Thucydides had made an emphatic statement that his plague narrative was born of personal experience ("I will show these things, both having myself become ill and also having seen others suffer").

[44] The adversative conjunctions (but rather, but rather) are emphatic: the usually reticent Thucydides will this time not abstain from mentioning the housing or civic order

familiar elements of the body had earlier provided the scene for each of the plague's successive victories, in this culminating passage the familiar and otherwise ordinary structures of the city are transformed into the staging grounds for death. Streets, fountain houses, and temples are equally and simultaneously overwhelmed. (Once again, the scene vividly reminds us of the polluted water.) To describe the people themselves, Thucydides uses the same oxymoron, "dying corpses," in both 2.52.2 and 2.52.3, supporting it with "half dead" in 2.52.2.[45] The sick are as close to death as to life.

These sentences prepare us for Thucydides' subsequent presentation of the effect beyond disorder that follows on the death of so many. Here is the rest of the paragraph; I have repeated the last sentence of the previous citation (2.52.3–4):

> And the temples in which they had taken shelter were full of corpses dying there. For overpowered by evil, the people, not knowing what would become of them, were turning equally to contempt for the sacred and the profane. And all the laws were in confusion which they had used beforehand concerning funerals, and they gave [the dead] funerals as each one was able. And many of them, because of a scarcity of necessary materials, since they had already performed the rites so often, turned to funerals that showed no sense of shame. For having anticipated those piling it up, some people, placing their own corpse on someone else's pyre, would light it, or others, when another pyre was burning, having thrown on top whomever they bore, went away.

The Athenians' indifference to their temples, which Thucydides here shows to be polluted, now extends to the dead themselves. The plague has driven the Athenians to abandon the funerary rites described in the so-called *patrios nomos* chapter at 2.34. Defeated by their sufferings (cf. 2.47.4) and a poverty of materials, many Athenians now treat their dead as burdensome disposal problems.

The belief that corpses were not to be defiled by neglect or carelessness or that temples should not be polluted with death were founda-

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that would have been necessary. His attention to describing this situation potentially reveals a criticism of Pericles' management of this result of his policies. Cf. 1.58.2, which shows that Perdiccas, King of Macedon, can manage a similar influx.

[45] Cf. n. 64 below and Lucretius' extended translation of this oxymoron at *DRN* 6.1268–72, showing that Lucretius perceived and wrote out the implications of Thucydides' image.

tions of both law and religion for Thucydides' readers.[46] The references to temples and corpses in these chapters function in a way similar to Thucydides' references to cultivated land in the Plataean story. Here as in the Plataean narrative Thucydides deploys these materials in order to show the attenuation of their significance for human beings by contrast to their persistence as physical objects or substances. The integrity of Plataean land or Athenian temples and bodies evaporates, but the physical things—earth, temples, or corpses—remain. In both narratives, his examples rely on the deployment of materials that evoke meanings close to the reader's heart and on a vivid portrayal of how that meaning is lost. These meanings, it should be noted, are conventional, since they must respond to the reader, and are therefore solidly un-Epicurean.

Consistent with all this, it seems important to note that here as at Plataea Thucydides is not content to make the depiction of natural necessity and ethical decline the determining frames of his narrative, but rather once again, he concludes with the suggestion that the events could be a sign of divine disfavor. He remarks that many Athenians sought for indications that the plague was sent by the gods, even quarreling over the words of old prophecies (2.54.2–3), but that only some knew about Apollo's promise to the Spartans (2.54.4–5):

> But there was also a memory, among those who knew about it, of an oracular response given to the Lacedaemonians, when to [the Spartans, who were] asking the god whether they should go to war, [the god] answered that they would win if they fought as hard as they could, and he affirmed that he himself would help them. Now concerning this oracle they assessed that the events were similar [i.e., to what had been predicted]. The disease began immediately with the Spartan attack, and did not attack the Spartans to any extent worth mentioning, but rested upon Athens most of all, since indeed Athens was the most populated place of that region.

While he knows about the role of contagion, Thucydides nevertheless makes room for the uncomfortable thought that Apollo may be helping the Spartans, with the result that both of our stories close with

[46]Transgression against either principle would normally have merited strict punishment. Cf. Parker 1996, 32–48 (and *passim*); Jordan 1986, 130. Efforts to prevent the pollution of temples with death are mentioned in several stories in Book 1 of Thucydides. Cf. 1.126.11, 1.128.1, and 1.134.2–4. Failure to prevent the pollution of temples and sanctuaries is common and tragic in Thucydides, however. Besides the plague story, see esp. 3.82.1 (suicide and murder in the temple of Hera at Corcyra) and 4.90–97 (pollution of the sanctuary at Delion).

the pre- and anti-Epicurean suggestion that the gods are directly active in human affairs.[47] At the same time, both stories boast the accuracy and veracity, not to mention the vividness, for which Thucydides' writing is justly famous.

In sum, Thucydides selected and deployed familiar natural and man-made materials for his plague narrative and his story of the siege of Plataea. These materials respond to his readers' values and thus allow Thucydides to characterize people and events. At the risk of repeating an argument already made, it seems useful to stress that, if Plataean land had no positive meaning for the reader, Spartan aggression could not be illustrated through showing its destruction. As it was, however, Plataean land had significance for nearly all Greek readers. In the same way, a reference to pyres, civic wells, or temples could be relied upon to provoke the desire for decorum, cleanliness, and order the plague narrative shows was unattainable.

Most interesting to the scholarly community, as we mentioned at the beginning of this article, has been Thucydides' referencing of the human materials of the plague passage. We have been able to isolate some rhetorical strategies Thucydides focused on these specific materials. For instance, Thucydides' tour of the human body, a depiction of materials meaningful to a universal audience, makes possible the dread his description of the plague's power has always produced, as well as some of his most effective juxtapositions (ugly sores and the desire to be naked, dying corpses).

Overall, however, we confirmed that the rhetorical deployment of references to materials in these two stories was similar. Selection and ordering of precise references (*akribeia*), a narrative organization

[47]Thomas 2006, 99, concludes similarly: "Indeed the plague, while natural, almost has a supernatural quality." She is referring to Thucydides' accumulating asseverations that doctors, diets ("regimens"), and human τέχνη were useless against the plague, to Thucydides' refusal to speculate about the causes of this disease, and to his statements that the disease was utterly unusual (it affected both animals and human beings) and beyond the capacity of human nature to endure. She does not mention 2.54, but it could be added to her evidence. The idea that the plague was a divine punishment sent by Apollo was current at Athens. The Athenians' purification of Delos in 426 (described at 3.104) was likely a response to the plague. Cf. Parker 1996, 275–76; and Geske 2005, 76–85, who makes a detailed argument that the general Nicias rose to popularity at Athens partly by reassuring the plague-stricken demos that he could propitiate the gods. Among other things, Nicias funded and celebrated the Delian festival to Apollo in the years following the plague (Geske 2005, 82 and 90). Additional ancient evidence for the prominence of this theme at Athens is delivered by the plague passage in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* (159–85). On Thucydides' description of this oracle, see Marinatos 1981, 139, with Hornblower 1991.

displaying repetition and parataxis, and the persistent focus on a limited spectrum of familiar materials, both natural and man-made, whose meanings responded to the reader's central concerns, were typical techniques. Both stories used vocabulary that gives evidence of Thucydides' interest in the scientific debates of his day, but that vocabulary was not subjected to rhetorical treatment that distinguished it from references to materials we would consider "non-scientific." Observed differences between the treatment of natural materials and material culture did arise from material culture's greater capacity to connote historical and cultural values: natural elements were more often integrated into comments on natural necessity. In the end, however, history and necessity unite. In both narratives we noticed that Thucydides' techniques were particularly well suited to illustrating that people and their things are being reduced to a merely physical existence. Reduced by warfare, exhausted and indifferent Spartans carry earth (once a home land) to a useless mound; reduced by the plague, exhausted and indifferent Athenians carry corpses (once citizens) to careless pyres.

Thucydides' focus on natural necessity, and on the consequences of that necessity for human beings, must have been welcome to Lucretius. On the other hand, Thucydides' references to materials are engaged in a rhetoric that draws on the traditional connection of religious and civic-ethical meanings.[48] This is a difficulty for Lucretius. Even more difficult is Thucydides' willingness to suggest that divine will might be involved in the cause of physical processes. Thus, Thucydides' materials are at once scientific and deeply engaged in the values likely to be shared among his (pre-Epicurean) readers, the same people who shared Thucydides' interest in Herodotus.[49]

[48] This is not to argue that Thucydides was necessarily more religious than we generally think he is. It is clear that he perceived the deep attachments religious beliefs and practices inspired in most Greek readers and the social importance of these attachments. As our Plataean story has demonstrated, and as the Athenians' reaction to the plague also demonstrates (cf. 2.47.4, 2.52.3, 2.53), these attachments are a political and social factor in the events reported (cf. Jordan 1986 or Furley 2006, esp. 424–35). The next chapters of Thucydides' plague narrative (2.53–54) address these themes explicitly and argue that the related deterioration of religious and civic values was an important factor in the decline of Athens.

[49] Herodotean influence is important for the plague narrative as well as the Plataean story. In the plague narrative Thucydides states his agreement with Herodotus' Solon, who had argued that there was no σῶμα αὔταρκες (Hdt.1.32.6–7). Thucydides also argues that "no body was self-sufficient (σῶμά τε αὔταρκες ὂν οὐδέν) against the disease, neither the strong nor the weak. All were destroyed; even those cared for in every possible way" (2.51.3). The

LUCRETIUS' PLAGUE

In the final section of this article I will make some suggestions about Lucretius' reaction to the rhetoric of Thucydides' plague narrative. For Lucretius, Thucydides' plague narrative was both rich and problematic. On the one hand, if Lucretius could mine Thucydides, a hero (for instance) of Cicero and Sallust, for a substantial narrative that appeared to support Epicurean principles, this was surely a philosophic and political victory.[50] Furthermore, Thucydides' plague story contains a lode of material evidence arranged into a vivid narrative form. On the other hand, Thucydides' narratives, which seek to engage a reader whose frame of mind is foreign to Lucretius' as yet uninvented Epicureanism, are more enmeshed in the values of conventional *religio* than an Epicurean could like.[51] If Lucretius was to claim this narrative for himself, rather than have it represent a point of view more sympathetic to his philosophical adversaries, he would be compelled to make some changes.

In the remarks that follow I will suggest that Lucretius perceived this problem and altered Thucydides' narrative in order to exclude the

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plague thus forms a contrast to the immediately preceding Funeral Oration, in which Pericles had formulated the opposing view. For him, Athens was "the most self sufficient city (τὴν πόλιν αὐταρκεστάτην)" (2.36.3), made up of citizens possessing "self sufficient bodies/lives (τὸ σῶμα αὔταρκες)" (2.41.1). In the plague narrative, Herodotus' ethical cast is adopted against the Periclean ethic; at the same time both historians' interest in defining man's physical situation in the world is evident from the fact that they state an opinion about the situation of the body. Cf. Macleod 1983, 151–53; Orwin 1994, 82; Scanlon 1994.

[50] Interest in the political aspect of Lucretius' use of Thucydides has been remarkably slight. See Penwill 1995, 83, with n.76, who argues that Lucretius deploys Thucydides in order to confront "the Ciceronian fantasy" with "the problem of evil." As will be evident from my argument, I do not agree. Conte 1994, 157, briefly mentions general political aspects of the struggle between the mostly Stoic senatorial class and the Epicureans, pointing out that even Cicero's eclecticism rigorously disqualified Epicureanism. See, however, Schiesaro 2007, whose interest is much greater, and on Lucretius' political thought as a whole, see Schofield 2000.

[51] This is not to suggest that a similar problem is not visible in Lucretius. See, e.g., Kennedy 2000, 205–26, who offers a convincing description of the anthropocentrism of even Lucretius' atomic vocabulary. It could in fact be argued that the cultural and religious associations of material objects were inescapable for both Thucydides and Lucretius and that they exploit them as well as they can. Thus, Lucretius used religious imagery frequently. For only two important and famous examples, see the praise of Epicurus at the openings of Books 3 and 5. Perhaps we could argue that the *DRN* is a differently focused narrative, one that exploits religious associations for deep irony and sublimity, and that it is combating a more traditional deployment of these associations in Thucydides.

competing values.[52] Among other changes, Lucretius excised Thucydides from the narrative, altered Thucydides' Athenians for his own purposes, and abandoned Thucydides' rhetorical techniques. In particular, Lucretius abandoned Thucydides' vivid and direct presentation of materials, his *akribeia*, in favor of language that supported his presentation of the terror of the unenlightened.

First, Lucretius takes over the narrator's role. Despite the fact that Thucydides was not only the author but also an actor in his own plague narrative, Lucretius never mentions Thucydides or the fact that Thucydides suffered the plague and survived to write the narrative Lucretius used.[53] Perhaps fearing that readers might tend to identify with Thucydides' progress to recovery and insight (so similar to the progress Lucretius otherwise demands of his reader!), Lucretius replaces Thucydides with himself. Furthermore, and in contrast to Thucydides, Lucretius uses a distant and fierce narratorial identity. He chastises and regulates the reader, whom he corrals into personal presence at descriptions of the greatest possible suffering.[54]

Lucretius also elides most of the historical context Thucydides provided. He adheres carefully to the sections of Thucydides' narrative that describe physical and psychological symptoms, omitting any reference to the Spartans or the Peloponnesian War, so that the civic and military necessities that forced the Athenians to crowd into the city are absent.[55] Thucydides' suggestion that the plague may have been sent by Apollo

[52] Scholars have often observed the alterations of Thucydides I outline here, although they do not relate them to Lucretius' reaction to the values inherent in Thucydides' narratives. Cf. esp. Commager 1957, 111 and *passim*; Bright 1971, 608–18; Clay 1983, 262–66; Stoddard 1996, 110–11; Sedley 1998, 164–65.

[53] Lucretius is normally unafraid to announce the original author of his material. His "translations" of Epicurus, whom he proclaims as divine (*DRN* 5.8, cf. 3.15), form the center of his philosophical enterprise. Furthermore, he mentions Homer, Ennius (*DRN* 1.117–26, cf. 3.1037–38) and other authors (e.g., Heraclitus, Empedocles, Anaxagoras: *DRN* 1.635–879, Democritus, *DRN* 3.1039) whose language, images, and arguments he deploys throughout the poem.

[54] Lucretius uses the Homeric technique (e.g., *Il.* 4.223) of inserting the reader into the story as an observer ("You would or would not have been able to see the following"); cf. *DRN* 6.1163, 6.1170, 6.1257, 6.1268. On the uses and effect of this technique, see de Jong, 1987, 54–60. On the ubiquity of the address to the reader in Lucretius, and the aggressive character of the Lucretian narrator, see Volk 2002, 73–83.

[55] Cf. Gale 1994, 225. Furthermore, other touches of social circumstance seem to be more Roman than Athenian. Especially foreign to Thucydides is the poverty of Lucretius' farmers (*DRN* 6.1252–58; cf. Thuc. 2.14, 2.16.1–2).

is of course also omitted. The air-borne disease alone, which would not have spared the Spartans if Lucretius had included any, triumphs (cf. 6.1119–37).

Alone with a foreign narrator and a terrifying disease, Lucretius' Athenians must change character. This happens, and as is well known, Lucretius' Athenians display a panicky irrationality not found in Thucydides. For example, where Thucydides' Athenians lose extremities to the plague (2.49.8), Lucretius' Athenians cut theirs off because of their fear of death (*DRN* 6.1208 and 1212). Again, in Thucydides, citizens who do not care for other sufferers cause further death and then die alone but receive no other punishment (2.51.5). Lucretius, on the other hand, condemns such people as "excessively greedy for life and fearful of death," and he writes that they were punished: "neglect punished them with a base and evil death, leaving them abandoned without help, slaughtering them" (*DRN* 6.1240–41). Finally, where Thucydides' exhausted Athenians throw their relatives on any pyre "and go away" (2.52.4), Lucretius' Athenians erupt into foolish violence and shed blood over corpses (6.1285): "For they placed their relatives on tombs built by others and put the torch to them, often struggling with much bloodshed rather than deserting them," writes Lucretius (6.1283–86). With these final lines, the last in his poem (as we have reconstructed it), Lucretius overturns the climax of Thucydides' story of the plague-stricken Attic immigrants.

For Epicureans, killing over the dead is surely the ultimate folly. In their ignorance of Epicurean philosophy, which alone can comprehend and encounter such disasters, Lucretius' Athenians feel the wrong emotions (fear of death) and behave in irrational ways.[56] Born by chance before the invention of the *vera ratio*, these Athenians would die in ignorance no matter how long they lived or how gently they died. But Lucretius has made as much as he can from this fact: his Athenian many are foolish and weak, and his Athenian few must die unenlightened. Perhaps the most vivid example of the comparative harshness of the Lucretian plague appears where Lucretius praises *optimus quisque* ("the best men"), those who showed compassion and went out to help their sick friends (6.1243–46). Unlike Thucydides, Lucretius explicitly kills every one of these people (6.1246). Thus, where Thucydides had shown that some Athenians (himself included) learned from their experience of the plague, Lucretius dooms

[56] On Lucretius' characterization of the Athenians as psychologically weak due to the lack of true philosophy, see, e.g., Bright 1971, 615; Segal 1990, 234–37; or Sedley 1998, 161. Commager 1957, 108, argues that Lucretius "makes the plague a punishment" for their lack of courage.

all Athenians to death in ignorance. His elision of Thucydides is consistent with and necessary for his depiction of the universal weakness of Athens, since one of his aims seems to have been to eliminate any chance that a pre-Epicurean Athenian might appear wise.[57]

Lucretius' response to the rhetoric of Thucydides' materials therefore occurs in the context of large-scale changes. Let us examine some important passages from Lucretius' plague narrative in detail. Lucretius' initial presentation of the plague's journey through the body stops at each of the stations that Thucydides had used to illustrate the momentum of the disease (6.1145–55):

> First they displayed heads on fire with fever
> and both eyes were red from within with a diffuse light.
> Their throats also within were black
> with blood, the road of the voice choked with sores.
> The tongue, interpreter of the mind, was dripping with gore,
> weakened by evils, heavy of motion, rough of touch.
> And when the dreadful force had traveled through the throat into the breast
> and had flowed into the mourning heart of the sick
> then all the bonds of life began to loosen.[58]

Lucretius' narrative hangs itself on Thucydides' simple and terrifying order, and it works out some of the suggestions inherent in Thucydides' original presentation. But Lucretius' disease is fundamentally different

[57] The intransigence of this position may be due to Lucretius' desire to illustrate the inevitable price of ignorance. It is perhaps useful to note that this argument is not inconsistent with the praise of Athens at *DRN* 6.1–8. The achievements of Athens in this passage depend on the birth of Epicurus. Furthermore, even in this much happier passage all humanity, Athens included, needs Epicurus and his doctrines if it is not to live in dire unhappiness (cf. *DRN* 6.9–34; Gale 1994, 228).

[58] For the reader's convenience, this footnote reprints the corresponding passage from Thucydides 2.49.2–4:

> Suddenly, although they had been healthy, and for no discernable reason, severe fevers of the head and redness and swelling of the eyes took [them], and the things within [the head], the throat and tongue, were immediately blood-red, and a strange and ill-smelling breath came forth. And then, [progressing] from these symptoms, sneezing and hoarseness ensued, and not much later the misery descended into the chest, with forceful coughing. And when it settled in the stomach, it overwhelmed it, and cleansings followed, of every kind of bile for which the doctors have names, and these with great suffering. And for most people an empty [= unproductive] retching followed, producing a strong convulsion, and this happened to some people upon the cessation of the previous symptoms, and to others long afterward.

from Thucydides' plague. A comparison with Thucydides' account shows that for Thucydides' initial statement of the patient's "forceful fevers of the head," Lucretius uses a metaphor: the head is "on fire with fever" (6.1145). The Thucydidean "redness and swelling of the eyes" becomes imagistic, even fantastic in Lucretius, who writes that "the two eyes [were] red from within with a diffuse light." Next, Thucydides' sore throat becomes a monstrosity that, together with the personified tongue, rots before the reader's eyes. Finally, the disease descends to the heart and leads us to death.[59]

Thucydides' initial symptoms had been concrete and familiar. They responded to readers whose concern for Athens (and for themselves) caused them to be interested in the actual history of the disease, including the ordinary sore throats and sneezing with which it began. As we have seen, Lucretius' disease has no milder opening phase. From the beginning of his description of the plague, Lucretius abandons Thucydides' *akribeia*, regardless of the fact that Thucydides' materials are of scientific value.[60] While Lucretius therefore hangs his narrative on the frame Thucydides' material references created, his symptoms and materials are new creations. They are not realistic and respond most directly to a reader who is able to understand that the symptoms of the plague are an illustration of the suffering of the unenlightened.[61]

Thucydides, as we saw, carefully selected and deployed his materials to connote a world the ancient Greek reader would hate to lose. He men-

[59] On the *cor/kardia* debate, see Rusten 1989, 184; Craik 2001, 106–7. They agree that *kardia* in Thucydides is some part of the stomach. In my view Lucretius' *cor* is not a "mistranslation" but an alteration made necessary by the intensity of Lucretius' plot and rhetoric.

[60] *Akribeia* is a ubiquitous Lucretian technique, so that Lucretius' choice of another style for this passage seems likely to be deliberate. Cf. Conte 1994, 171: "the most distinctive feature of Lucretian style is concreteness of expression. Plainness and liveliness of description, the visible, perceptible quality of the things discussed, the corporeality of the imagery." The argument that Lucretius chose to abandon Thucydides' *akribeia* is an adjunct to arguments about the nature of language in Lucretius. If Lucretius did, as I am suggesting, perceive and abandon Thucydidean *akribeia*, he has abandoned in this passage his commitment to be useful to the reader about reality in a direct sense and has instead committed himself to rescuing the reader from the ultimate effects of the corruption of language, as they reveal themselves in Thucydides' pre-Epicurean commitments. Cf. Holmes 2005.

[61] For what seems to me to be a well-founded argument that the disease itself is symbolic of the state of unenlightened humanity, see Warren 2000, 144–48; Gale 1994, 227–28, and 2001, 40. Lucretius had often compared the suffering of the unenlightened to the symptoms of disease, most recently during the praise of Athens at the beginning of Book 6. Cf. *DRN* 2.12, 3.1054, 4.1090, etc. A fuller list, with cross references, is provided in Gale 2001, 40.

tioned those things to which his reader was attached, be they his own body, his city, or his land, and showed in some detail their destruction. Lucretius' description of the madness caused by the plague's sufferings again demonstrates his rejection of this Thucydidean mode (6.1170–77):

> You would have been able to make nothing, were it ever so light or thin,
> useful for their limbs, but always only cold wind.
> And some hurled themselves into the cold rivers, because they were
> burning with the disease,
> throwing their naked bodies into the waves.
> Many threw themselves headlong into the well water,
> thronging to [the wells] with their mouths wide open.
> But the burning thirst was insatiable, though they submerged their
> bodies,
> and made much water the same as a small amount.[62]

Lucretius' attitude toward those who suffer from madness as a result of the plague is uncompromising. Thucydides' observer was an Athenian, and his drowning Athenians were "the neglected," namely, those who were receiving inadequate care. Their neglect was one reason for their behavior, and Thucydides' example, as we saw, showed that the lack of compassion (or simply, lack of organization) among the Athenians was causing a social disaster, namely, the pollution of the wells.

By contrast, Lucretius universalizes: he makes the reader into the observer and rejects Thucydides' reason for the behavior of the sick; in Lucretius, the madmen are simply "some" people or "many" people (6.1172 and 1174). Again, Lucretius adds rivers to the wells into which Thucydides' patients had thrown themselves. The civic focus of Thucydides' description is thereby elided. Water in this story is generalized, like the Athenians themselves, and no longer supports associations of civic contamination. Instead it becomes a general temptation for the generally weak Athenians.[63] The Athenians succumb, as they must, and

[62] For the reader's convenience, this note reprints the corresponding passage from Thucydides 2.49.5:

> And if anyone touched the outside of the body, it was not excessively warm, nor was it pallid, but flushed, bright, and florid with small blisters and wounds. But the inner parts of the body were burning so that they could not endure the touch of the lightest coverings or sheets, or to be anything else but naked; most of all they desired to throw themselves into cold water. And many of the neglected did this, throwing themselves into the wells, afflicted by their ceaseless thirst. But more and less drink were the same.

[63] Cf. Gale 1994, 226–28. Lucretius' sufferer is every unenlightened person.

Lucretius characterizes his Athenians' loss of self-control and *gravitas* with a depiction of the body language symptomatic of their state of mind: they throng to the water "with their mouths wide open." A few changes to the material elements of this passage have produced a radically different story. Rather than provoking a sense that meaningful personal and civic values are being destroyed, Lucretius' narrative culminates in the opposite: a detached or even contemptuous picture of the uselessly open-mouthed sufferers.[64]

Thus, Lucretius reacted to Thucydidean rhetoric on every level. Major surgery, such as the elision of Thucydides and the recasting of the Athenians, altered the larger plot, and detailed reworking diverted the associations of Thucydides' physical evidence to new and Epicurean aims. Lucretius did not privilege scientific accuracy in making these changes but rather deployed techniques that overwhelmed the accuracy of the Thucydidean original. This was necessary in order to recast the narrative to support his point of view. Incidentally, Lucretius' purposeful alterations of Thucydides' materials provide strong evidence that he read and understood Thucydides' materials according to their meanings. In other words, he was accustomed to considering references to materials as elements of persuasion not only in his own work but also in the writing of authors as distant from himself as the Greek historians.

But Lucretius' relationship to Thucydides is not only about the past. Taken together, Lucretius' changes to Thucydides' plague narrative make the Thucydidean narrative into an eyewitness account of the utter weakness of pre-Epicurean Athens. Thucydides' Athens is the Athens of Socrates and Pericles, and, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, it seems possible that Lucretius' larger aim was to undermine Academic and/or Stoic foundations.[65] This tempting suggestion would account for Lucretius' decision to use Thucydides' plague narrative even though he perceived its unfriendliness to his philosophy and also for the aggressiveness of the changes Lucretius undertakes.

[64] Another example of this treatment occurs with Lucretius' trans. of Thucydides' oxymoronic "dying corpses" (2.52.2 and 3) at *DRN* 6.1268–71. Here again Lucretius inserts the reader as observer. In Thucydides' description the corpses die upon one another in the road, or gather at the springs, or die in temples. Lucretius abandons most of the urban landscape (he mentions roads) and focuses almost exclusively on the filth of the half living, who are "hidden in rags and the filth of the body, just a skin on bones, nearly buried in dirt and foul sores." Once again, civic pathos disappears, and the sufferer becomes more disgusting.

[65] On the conflict between the Stoics and Epicureans, see Momigliano 1941, and with some reference to Lucretius, Hutchinson 2001.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that Lucretius manages his sentence from Thucydides' Plataean story in a way that resembles his treatment of the plague passage. Toward the end of our discussion of the Plataean story we had mentioned the following sentence (2.77.4): "for indeed in the mountains wood rubbed together by wind spontaneously sent up fire and flame because of this." Lucretius' reworking of this sentence, and his answer to it, run as follows (1.897–903):

> 'At saepe in magnis fit montibus' inquis 'ut altis
> arboribus vicina cacumina summa terantur
> inter se validis facere id cogentibus austris,
> donec flammai fulserunt flore coorto.'
> scilicet et non est lignis tamen insitus ignis,
> verum semina sunt ardoris multa, terendo
> quae cum confluxere, creant incendia silvis.
>
> "But it often happens on large mountains," you argue, "that the neighboring tops of the high trees rub upon one another, since the strong winds compel them to do this. And in the end they gleam from the bloom of flame that has arisen." But fire is clearly not innate in the branches, but in truth there are many atoms of heat, which, when they flow together because of the rubbing, create fires in the forests.

Once again, Lucretius denies wisdom to ancient Athens: Thucydides' description is quoted by the ignorant reader and corrected by Lucretius. In respect to Lucretius' awareness of Thucydides' materials, we note his careful and vivid translation of Thucydides' hendiadys πῦρ καὶ φλόγα (fire and flame) with *flore flammai*. We also note the speaker's use of vivid modifiers such as *magnis, altis, summa* and the descriptive verb *fulserunt*, none of which are from Thucydides, as he depicts Thucydides' idea. The lines that follow, in which Lucretius explains the correct answer, are devoid of such modifiers. The contrast demonstrates Lucretius' careful manipulation of rhetorical registers: the narrator's blunt speech seems to stand for certainty relative to the reader's excitable ignorance. Thus, as well as displaying, once again, Lucretius' treatment of Thucydides' materials, this short passage tends to confirm that Lucretius was treating Thucydides as a source of ideas whose information was to be carefully subordinated.

In sum, our initial comparison of Thucydides' stories of the plague and the siege of Plataea showed the importance of references to natural and man-made materials in structuring the plots of both stories. Thucydides' materials, many of which were familiar from Hippocratic

and generally pre-Socratic culture, and all of which originate with the fifth-century author and reader, had a variety of rhetorical purposes and sometimes supported meanings that were compatible with Epicurean thought, but at other times, they did not. Thucydides' use of materials to support references to divine agency or to create demonstrations that abandonment of inherited values is dehumanizing, for instance, posed more or less subtle challenges to the Epicurean message.

Lucretius, a careful reader of Thucydides and of Thucydides' materials, perceived that there was much agreement, but also much disagreement, between himself and the historian. Lucretius had ample alternative information from which to construct an account of plagues.[66] Instead of excluding Thucydides' narrative, he made an intense effort to subordinate Thucydides' account to the Epicurean view of the world. He elided Thucydides from his narrative, re-characterized Thucydides' Athenians, and abandoned the precision of Thucydides' description of Athens and the plague. In these ways he turned Thucydides' narrative to Epicurean purposes. Lucretius' plague narrative can thus be seen as the staging ground of a contest: Lucretius and Epicurus against Thucydides, with Herodotus and Homer standing behind him. Since failure to subordinate Thucydides' account would be evident to his contemporary philosophical opponents, the stakes were high. Far from exposing "Lucretian pessimism," therefore, one could argue that the plague passage is an energetic attempt to establish Epicurean principles against most difficult opposition.

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[66] Cf. Bailey 1947, 29, and 1723–24; Bright 1971, 615–18; and copious textual evidence (e.g., *DRN* 6.1179–95, 1253–58).

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